

MUMMIFICATION,

And other similar customs as practised by the Queensland Aborigines, and exemplified by specimens in the Queensland Museum collections.

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(Plates 4-11.)

THE methods practised by the aboriginal inhabitants of Queensland in the matter of the disposal of their dead are extremely varied, gruesome, and revolting, and only a few scientific workers have made a real study of them. A great many disjointed accounts of interment and customs appertaining to the disposal of the dead have from time to time been published, but it is questionable whether reliance can be placed upon them, since the native is at all times very reticent and regards the interference of the white races with disfavour and distrust. We are, however, indebted to Dr. Roth ⁽¹⁾ for a valuable contribution dealing with Queensland customs in particular.

The Queensland Museum collections contain a fairly representative number of specimens which lend colour and confirmation to the writings of previous ethnologists. It is my intention strictly to avoid any vain repetition: the illustrations will speak for themselves. The object of this short paper is not so much to add anything new, as to place on record the various kinds of material which have from time to time come into our possession. Experience has taught us that with the very primitive races there is a considerable elasticity in native methods, and although the practices in the main are the same, they vary in detail. With wandering races such as ours, this elasticity doubtless is due to local conditions, and to the amount and kind of material available at time of death. One thing is strikingly noticeable, and that is the apparent callousness of the natives as to whether they dispose, by burial or otherwise, of the whole body or only a part of it. This is continually emphasised by various authors although reference is not made to it in so many words; consequently the so-called "coffins" contain as a rule only a small fraction of the original body, as will be seen when considering the accompanying reproductions.

(1) Walter E. Roth, *North Queensland Ethnography*, Bulletin No. 9.
Records of Australian Museum Vol. 6, No. 5, 18th July, 1907.

PLATE 4.

Mummy of adult aboriginal from Trinity Bay, Queensland.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 12/109.

Interest in this specimen lies in the fact that although it has been prepared according to the customary methods, the precaution seems to have been taken of removing the kneecap of the dead man prior to burial with a view to prevent "walking." Reference is made to this specimen by Thomas ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ N. W. Thomas, "Natives of Australia," London, 1906.



MUMMY OF AN ADULT.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 12/109.

Face page 8.

PLATE 5.

An adult aboriginal mummy from Johnstone River, Queensland.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 11/88.

This body was that of a very small type of man. The teeth are those of an adult and are much worn.



MUMMY OF AN ADULT.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 11/98.

PLATE 6.

Mummy of an aboriginal child from Cairns, Queensland.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 11/87.

Much desiccated. Greater part of the head missing and lower jaw toothless.



MUMMY OF A CHILD.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 11/87.

PLATE 7.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 12/124.

Skull of infant wrapped in dilly-bag as carried about by the mother.
Embley River, Queensland.



THE SKULL OF AN INFANT.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 12/124.

PLATE 8.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 11/65.

Skeleton (incomplete) of aboriginal youth wrapped in banana leaves and bound round with lawyer-cane. From Goondi, Johnstone River, Queensland. Dimensions, 25 in. x 12 in.

QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.



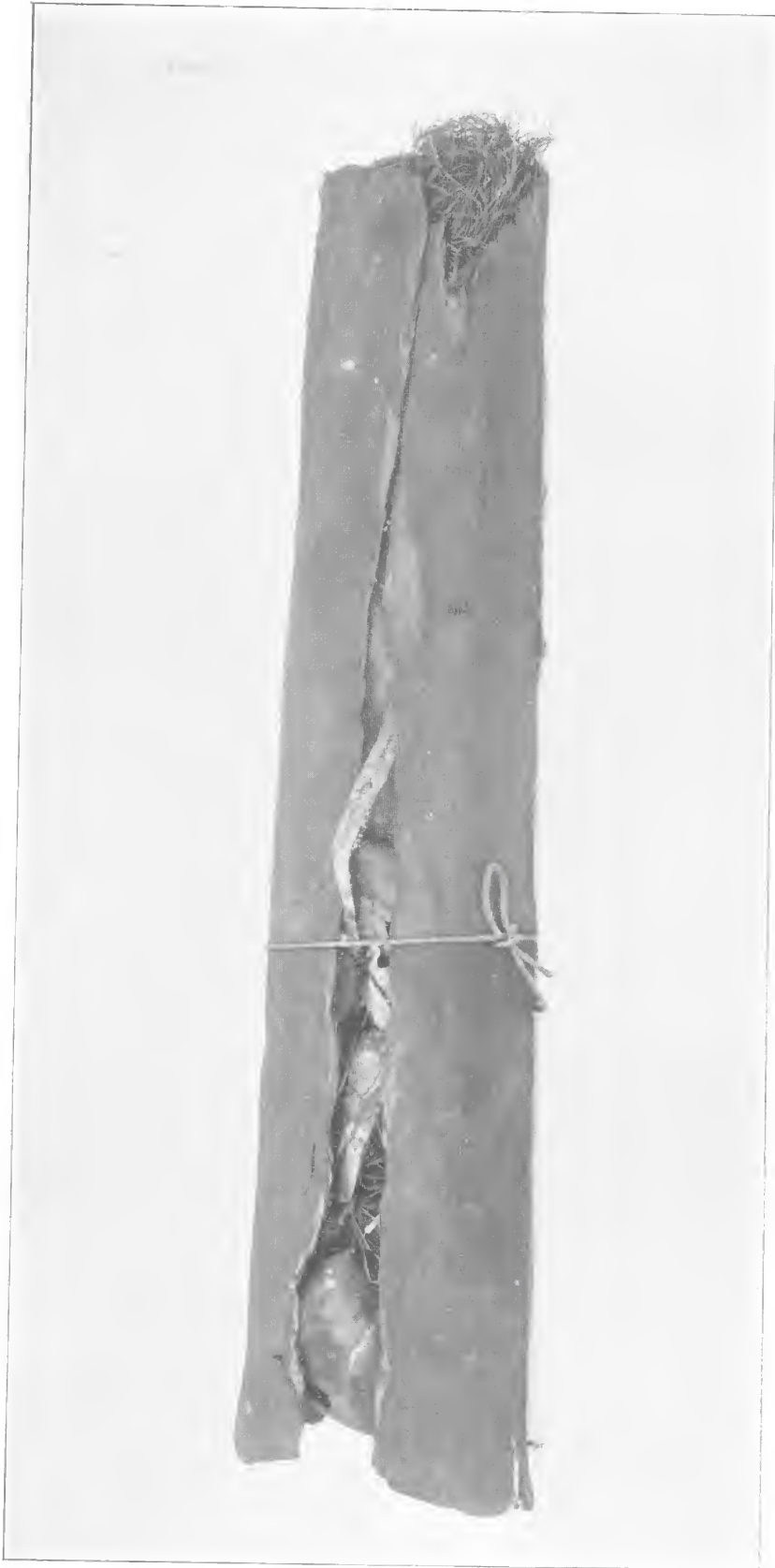
SKELETON WRAPPED IN BANANA LEAVES.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 11/65.

PLATE 9.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 12/84.

Skeleton of aboriginal infant enclosed in bark cylinder and filled up with dry grass. Nearly complete. Length, 31 in. From a cave at the head of Maranoa River, Queensland.

QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.



SKELETON OF A CHILD ENCLOSED IN A BARK CYLINDER.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 11/84.

PLATE 10.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 12/185.

Remains of aboriginal, mostly small, contained in a bark cylinder, tied tightly with native cord and cemented with native gum. Fragile. Length, 34 in.

Loc.: Queensland; exact locality unknown.

QUEENSLAND ABORIGINES.



SKELETON REMAINS IN BARK CYLINDER.
Q. M. Specimen No. Q. E. 12/185.

PLATE 11.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 11/86.

A dilly-bag containing bones of relatives and carried by women for certain moons and then placed by them in a hollow tree.

Loc.: Queensland. Exact locality unknown.

Specimen: No. Q.E. 11/89.

Bark coffin of the pleat type used by the natives on the Laura River for their distinguished dead. Skeleton incomplete, head missing. Dimensions, 19 in. x 10½ in. The trough is unlined, the skeleton having been covered on top only with a thin layer of bark.

(Not illustrated.)

Specimen: No. Q.E. 12/186.

A human skin, consecrated to the memory of a relative, in good state of preservation.

When a man is killed, or dies, in the vigour of manhood, his nearest relatives summon all their friends to a feast, and the body is skinned, cut up, and devoured amidst the wailing of women and the mournful chantings of men who detail in melancholy and monotonous strains the virtues of the deceased and the chief occurrences of his life.

The skin is stretched upon two spears and rubbed with grease and charcoal in order to assist its preservation. From a cave, Blackall Range, Queensland.